

## Eight Weeks in Benin Wrote a Beautiful Chapter of My Life as a Grandfather

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*Tatsuo Sasaki and Patrice Huard; Right: Lecturing in the Cherubim Church*

*The author and his wife Nellie were the first couple in Europe to bless 430 couples, during four months in the Philippines in 2015. In 2018, he went to Benin for eight weeks and taught four hundred religious leaders, about thirty couples and fifty-eight students. He also witnessed to three students who attended a seven-day seminar. His testimony sheds light on the work of God in Benin and on what grandfathers can do together to help the providence.*

This was my very first trip to Africa. But why Benin and why in 2018? This mission to Benin proved timely in the history of our blessed family. My wife Nellie is from the Netherlands; I am French. We received the blessing in May 1978, among the 118 couples in London. Forty years later, our three children all have spouses linked to Africa and we have eight grandchildren. This year, my wife and I were one of the couples chosen to be present at the inauguration of the Cheon Bo Won. Two of our sons will be there with us, and both have a connection to Benin.

In fact, our children are all blessed to children of 1975 Japanese missionaries to Africa (from the 1,800 couple group). Our daughter to a son of Mr. Sasada, a missionary in Zambia; my son Alexandre to a daughter born in Benin, where her parents were missionaries and my son Axel to Hitomi, a daughter of Tatsuo Sasaki, a 1975 missionary to Niger, currently a special envoy to Benin. The blessings of my children connect to Japanese in Africa. Tatsuo Sasaki has been in Africa for forty-three years and is now seventy. I just turned sixty-eight.

Yet, this account of my family would be nothing without the great providence True Parents are leading. This year is truly the African year for Unificationism. The head of state in Senegal welcomed True Mother in January. The second Africa Summit will take place in South Africa in November. Forty-three years of investment in Africa continues bearing fruit in 2018. This African providence must not only encompass True Mother and the great summits; it must also be part of our own lives. During my stay of eight weeks, I mainly worked in Cotonou, Abomey-Calavi, Porto-Novo, Dangbo, Misérété, all on the coast, and briefly inside the territory, in Bohicon and in Parakou, the big city in the north.

### **Why I worked in Benin**

I would like to explain with what motives I went to Benin. Once there, I was able to work with Rev. Sasaki, the Cheon Il Guk special envoy to that country. Working with someone who has done more than four decades of mission work in Africa is a great privilege. For our family, Rev. Sasaki is much more than "a special envoy." He is the father of one of my stepdaughters. Our destinies and lineages have met, and we have grandchildren in common.

Rev. Sasaki and I have received abundant blessings from God, who gave us good lives, good families and beautiful children and grandchildren. Together, for eight weeks, we wrote a beautiful chapter of our lives as happy and healthy grandfathers, finding joy from being in the mission field. My story is a testimony to the active friendship between two grandfathers and what Victor Hugo called "How to be a Grandfather" (original French title, *L'Art d'être Grand-Père*) in which he wrote, "Old grandpa God gives ear, amazed." Grandparents, like both of us, must be inspiring for our grandchildren but also for the grandfather of all grandfathers.

Nevertheless, I did not chose Benin only for family ties. After the Dakar summit and the change of status to Heavenly Africa, that Europeans continue to be concerned is important, because we can sometimes open doors if we work on a team.

Benin is a French-speaking country, six hours by air from Paris, where our movement has two thousand members among a population of ten million. Above all, Benin is a democratic country, one of the most stable in sub-Saharan Africa. Its president, Patrice Talon, is a businessman and therefore knows how to manage budgets. His predecessor also came from civil society. Benin is certainly a poor country, without oil, gold or diamonds. Yet, it is a country at peace and one of the most advanced in Africa in terms of its citizen's freedom. An authoritarian government could be favorable toward our movement but suddenly change or be the victim of a coup or a revolution. Working for the providence in a democratic country, where there is security and stability is important for me. In order to restore a nation, democracy is an asset. After two months in Benin, I believe that this nation has good potential for restoration before 2020.



### **My mission objectives in Benin**

Upon arriving in Cotonou, I was available for the needs of providence and I integrated into an itinerant team of leaders visiting and teaching religious leaders. This team included Emmanuel Allognon, the national leader, Rev. Sasaki, Pascal Degbé and me. The mayors of the communes made connections for us with the religious leaders so that we could give them both inter-religious and civic training. Each time, we sent the mayor a letter calling for all the religious men to come to our seminars and they came. I appreciated this cooperation between the political and religious authorities for the common good. The fact that we were able to teach four hundred leaders throughout the country in eight weeks, thanks to our total unity, indicates that God had prepared something.

Our seminars address "being good," the primary goal for a human being. Being good is the basis of all religions and changing one's religion is unnecessary to be good; nevertheless, participants see that we bring new concepts that help the modern human being to be good. We teach the principle of creation, the four realms of heart, the fall and the blessing. Seeing two Africans, a Japanese and a Frenchmen working in total unity as if they were a family certainly touched our guests. They could see that we had different minds but one heart and a common vision.

After our inter-religious seminars, they ask for all our presentation materials, which they use to teach and guide their congregations. They all want to work with us. We reached twenty-seven different Christian groups and many Muslims. The latter were often warm-hearted. That they often have several wives is

true. We told them then that we cannot give them the blessing under those circumstances, but they could take part in the work by teaching their children and grandchildren to have only one wife. Their good hearts touched me. Though they could not receive the blessing, they understood its spirit and were supportive.

From the spirit world, one religious leader heard "If you want to grow spiritually, you have to study the Divine Principle." The day before the seminar, he dreamed and saw four people in gym shorts. The next day he recognized those people as the four of us who were giving the lectures. In the evening, he asked God why we had been in gym shorts in his dream. God led him to understand that the four men were his athletes, as St. Ignatius of Antioch said, "As God's athletes, be sober."

Our teachings raise the level of religious leaders concern, as often their own formations remain rudimentary. Many were surprised to see the extent of our knowledge of the Bible, the Quran and other religions. They also see the importance of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation among all religious authorities in providing moral direction to their country. Moreover, morality is under siege in Benin, even in a traditional and rural society. That marital problems, lack of communication between parents and children, and pornography among young people are confusing to them often came up in their remarks. We do not interact with their congregations because in other countries this has caused problems. They have to teach their congregation with our discrete support.

### **Sowing seeds**

Another aspect of my mission was working with students. Rev. Sasaki and the Japanese Cheon Il Guk missionaries are very keen to develop CARP and train future leaders, even if they do not necessarily become members of our church. I was grateful to participate in a seminar with a dozen students in Parakou. Nine hours of traveling by public bus was difficult; once there though, being with open-minded young people was a pleasure. I was able to connect with three students who all attended a seven-day seminar.

I did not sow only spiritual seeds in Benin. With Rev. Sasaki, I started to learn moringa culture -- how to plant it and how to prepare it. This tree is nutritious and effective against pollution. It is perfectly adapted to the soil in Benin and the tropical climate. To work in the hot weather is not easy, but it is such a joy to be able to offer moringa plants to the mayors of communes or to the religious leaders.